

Carpenter (H. W.)

ANNUAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MADISON COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY,

JULY 8th, 1873

BY THE PRESIDENT,

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OF ONEIDA, N. Y.

GENTLEMEN: Through the courtesy of this society I was elected President at the last annual meeting, although I could not meet with you on that occasion. I consequently take this opportunity of thanking you for the honor conferred upon me. The time has again come when this society meet together for their annual deliberations, and it is expected that, in accordance with the laws and customs of this association, the retiring presiding officer shall occupy a portion of your time in presenting some subject for your consideration relating to the science of medicine. From among the large number of topics to select from, I have chosen as my subject, "A few Facts and Hints for the People." It is not my purpose to trace the history of medicine from its infancy, or present a treatise on diseases for study. I propose to show some of the popular obstacles which are in the way of true medical science and give a few hints or suggestions whereby this growing evil may in part be corrected.

If we commence at the root of the evil we shall be obliged to point out the public press. When we look over our papers and find column after column filled by advertisements of pretended specifics for every imaginable form of disease; and when we visit hundreds of families and find they have each tried scores of these quack remedies advertised, and have not received any benefit, we cannot wonder that there is a certain evidence of credulity on their part as to the influence and power of medicine in curing disease, and a distrust in the medical profession and in the use of medi-

cine. And this distrust, I am sorry to say, is often strengthened from the fact that they have tried these remedies and patronized advertising quacks on the recommendation of ministers of the gospel. We can hardly take up a paper but we will find a testimonial from a minister under some charlatan's advertisement. We feel unwilling to believe that they do this for our or the people's injury, but it has become a habit with many of them to not only recommend patent remedies, but they use them extensively in their own families. True, they prove the truth of the old adage "that anything not worth paying for is not worth having," consequently they obtain these remedies and pay for them rather than employ a thoroughbred physician, who popular custom has almost obliged to doctor *minister's families* without remuneration.

Not long since I saw a large number of empty bottles. The medicine they had contained was taken by a minister's family who was a firm believer and follower of the homeopathic dogma; and I noticed on those bottles such names as Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, Ague Cure, Phoenix Bitters, Poor Man's Bitters, Vinegar Bitters, Kennedy's Medical Discovery, &c., &c. Now it would not be at all surprising that this minister, as well as many other people, would have but little confidence in medicine and speak slightly of it, and denounce doctors and the whole profession after filling their stomachs with such villainous compounds and receiving no benefit, and still suffering from their baneful effects.

The most obstinate case of hemorrhoids I ever treated was caused from using "Vinegar Bitters," one of the vilest compounds that was ever advertised. But if ministers are disposed to recommend quacks and their preparations and entertain such feelings toward true physicians, they should be more guarded and not say anything that would be detrimental to the interests of the medical profession. Not many years ago the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher made the declaration in a public lecture that all that doctors did was to coax their patients to cure themselves.—There was about as much common sense in the assertion as that a surgeon could coax his patient to take the knife and remove a tumor, amputate a limb, or perform the operation of lithotomy. The true physician of to-day is the same as the physician of half a century ago, and although humbug and quackery in every form is running rampant, still the profession is constantly but slowly gaining strength, and I trust will yet outstride the storm of bigotry and charlatanry. I am well aware that we are often treated with base ingratitude and exposed to the neglect, contempt and reproach of those who are the first when ill to demand our services.

"God and the doctor they alike adore,
But only when in sickness, not before;
The sickness o'er, both are alike required,
God is forgotten and the doctor slighted."

Little do they know of the unceasing solitudes and toils of the physician, the dangers to which he is exposed, the anxiety and care he has for the recovery of his patients, the many secrets and sorrows entrusted to him which no one else knows, and it may be some sins of which God alone is cognizant of, the many sleepless nights, the lonesome and dreary rides through storm and tempest, dragging wearily along over rough roads and broken bridges, floundering in snow-banks, or driving through untrodden fields. In fact, going when and where he is called, leaving the quiet fireside at home, the interesting book, pleasing society, his bed—in short, everything, to aid in relieving suffering humanity. Of this we need no better evidence than some of the oldest medical gentlemen of this society can give who have grown gray in relieving human agony and promoting human health and happiness. Many of them went forth more than thirty years ago armed with

science, skill and kindness, and they have constantly been faithful ministering angels to the afflicted. Monuments have been erected in memory of illustrious benefactors, but such monuments would crumble into insignificance when contrasted with one erected in memory of such physicians in consideration of the benevolent and unrequited labors they have so quietly and unostentatiously performed in a life-long practice.

Truly, the physician's life is an anxious and trying one, and to use a familiar expression, we have a world of work before us. No one unacquainted with a physician's life can form any correct idea of the amount of responsibility there is resting upon him. If we are attending a patient dangerously sick, see how the parents and friends watch every move we make.* How they wait and watch for every visit. How a cheerful word from us will make their hearts leap with joy and give them courage to watch more faithfully, if possible, over the bed of distress. And when we can safely inform them that the crisis is passed, that their dear one (an only child, it may be,) will recover, their whole soul will for the time being go out to us with unspeakable gratitude. But I am sorry to say that such scenes are, with some, soon forgotten and the physician sadly neglected.

Again, we have not only to acquire and apply in practice for the benefit of those entrusted to our immediate charge all the knowledge which instruction and experience can impart, but we endeavor to aid in advancing the science to which we are professedly devoted. Its benevolent actions, its arduous duties and weighty responsibilities; its relation to man's temporal condition and the broad field of scientific investigation it embraces, should not only secure to it the respect and confidence of mankind, but should secure it a remuneration commensurate with its dignity, intelligence and exacting duties, and should give it that protection from empiricism which not only the Legislature but an intelligent people can greatly assist in doing. With this support it will encourage scholarship and proficiency in the profession, release it from a disheartening competition with fraud and false empiricism, and which will bestow upon the community the price-

less blessings of the real and a needed freedom from the assumed. The amount of study and experiment necessary to an intelligent and skillful treatment of human ailments need not be enlarged upon. All intelligent people are aware that in no other profession is thorough knowledge and good judgment so much needed, for in no other can blundering and ignorance be attended with such immediately disastrous consequences. No longer ago than last week a lady residing in Remsen, Oneida County, lost her life by trusting it in the hands of a quack. This lady, whose age was about 45 years, had a tumor. A man residing in an adjoining town who called himself "doctor," told her he could cure her, and prevailed upon her to try a liniment he prepared. This lady made an application of the liniment, and on the same day was obliged to take her bed. She grew rapidly worse, and in three or four days she died. Some of the neighbors, who did not have a very favorable opinion of this so-called doctor, insisted upon having an inquest held, which was done, and the verdict rendered was "that deceased came to her death in consequence of a tumor, but believe that death was hastened by an application made to the tumor by this quack." And here the matter was at an end. There was no law to reach him, simply because he has no diploma. If he had he could be arrested for malpractice. I have referred to this case because it is of so recent date, but it is only one of thousands of cases that are almost daily occurring. The quack "doctor" is the enemy of the great circle of unfortunates among whom he operates. He is the enemy, also, of science. His presence is a continual hindrance and vexation to those who strive for the highest attainments in derived knowledge and in original research. His disappearance would be a general good, and he can best serve his age by dying for it. Such things then being universally acknowledged, whatever steps are taken for the removal of such pests of society are matters of popular interest.

Last winter there was a bill entitled "An act relative to the medical laws of the State of New York," before the Legislature. It proposed to give the decision of qualification for the practice of medicine, surgery and midwifery wholly into the hands of those up-

on whom chartered schools of medicine have given the right to practice, the incorporated State societies of the several medical faiths—allopathic, homeopathic or eclectic—to have supreme supervision. Another provision of the bill was that there should be appointed from each of the three medical societies, viz: The county, district and State societies censors, whose duty it should be to examine and report upon the qualification of all practitioners. In the County Clerk's office there was to be a book kept, upon which it would be the duty of the censors to record the names of all those within the county who possess the right to practice. Any one who should solicit medical practice by sign, advertisement, or by the adoption of the title, doctor, whose name was not found written in that book, would be liable to prosecution in the courts, and the president of each county society should be the prosecuting agent. It authorized the censors to issue diplomas to the members of the county society, and any one found in a professional capacity without the authority of the censors would be guilty of misdemeanor. The punishment for the offense was placed at a fine of five hundred dollars or an imprisonment of not less than a month or more than a year's duration. The ends which this bill aimed to accomplish were desirable. The measure proposed may seem severe, but what other course can reach the charlatan?

The freedom of this State from the heartless, avaricious schemers who go from place to place playing upon the ignorance or superstition of those who do not know better than to employ them, would be a blessing. Human lives are too precious to be hazarded by any chance of ill-treatment save that which the most skilled may commit. Each practitioner is answerable to the highest authorities of his own school, and by their decision he stands or falls. No matter what school he represents, this law would not shut the door to any who merit and has the entire confidence of the public, and whatever method he employed intelligently and conscientiously he would have nothing to fear from a law to regulate the operation of such contemptible imposters. If this had become a law, and I dislike very much to give my opinion why it did not, it would be nothing more than the

concentration into a legal form of the beliefs and convictions of all who have ever had opportunity to judge of the deception, extortion and crime practiced by self-styled doctors who, shut out from society, are accountable to no one until the law appoints persons to guard the community against them.

In conclusion I would suggest, and I hope to see the suggestion carried out, that a medical society be organized in every town or every two or more towns (so as to accommodate physicians within a circle of from five to eight miles) where meetings can be held as often as once a month; and let these organizations be branches of the county organization. And I would be in favor of inviting in physicians of other schools, either male or female, if they reside in the vicinity. I believe in giving all a fair and equal chance, and woman, especially if engaged in the

practice of medicine, with no prejudice or embarrassing restrictions to discourage her, and if she fails under these circumstances to maintain her professional position she will gradually and naturally turn to other fields of labor and occupation. In associations of this kind the object would not only be for the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of measures adapted to the relief of suffering and to improve the health and protect the lives of the community, but the elevation of professional character and the protection of the personal interests of the members of the medical profession generally. In a pecuniary point of view I think it could be made desirable, and although everything be done fairly and with the single end of equal and exact justice to all, it would have a tendency to so educate the people that every citizen would feel his responsibility as a citizen to recognize and respect the rights of the physician.